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STATE FOR NEA/FO (GRAY) AND FOR NEA/MAG (HARRIS AND
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NSC FOR ABRAMS AND RAMCHAND

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: TUNISIAN INTEL COOPERATION IMPROVING

REF: A. PARIS 4533
[1](#)B. TUNIS 1328 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)C. 09/14/2007 BUSH-BEN ALI LETTER
[1](#)D. TUNIS 544
[1](#)E. 2/23/07 HAYDEN/BEN ALI LETTER

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary. After several recent high-level USG interventions with the GOT, most importantly the September letter from President Bush to President Ben Ali, it appears that the Tunisian Ministry of Interior (MOI) is making an effort to improve intelligence sharing on counterterrorism issues. Following the Ambassador's November 15 meeting with the Minister of Interior, GOT security services have shared an increasing amount of intelligence information, including about the disrupted December 2006/January 2007 threat to US and UK interests in Tunisia. While it is too early to judge if this cooperation will continue, the recent improvement is noteworthy. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) The GOT's intelligence and security cooperation, like much bilateral cooperation, has been plagued for years by a lack of Ministry of Interior responsiveness and generally limited exchange of information. Although the 2005 visit of former Presidential Homeland Security Advisor Fran Townsend resulted in increased GOT efforts to combat the flow of Tunisian foreign fighters to Iraq, intelligence cooperation on domestic issues remained lacking.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Following the December 2006/January 2007 disruption of a terrorist plot that allegedly targeted US and UK interests in Tunisia, Post and Washington repeatedly urged the GOT at many levels to improve cooperation. Most notably, in February 2007, CIA Director General Hayden sent a letter to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali asking for greater information exchange. Similarly, President Bush told Ben Ali in a September 2007 letter that the United States and Tunisia need to enhance counterterrorism cooperation. During a November 15 meeting, the Ambassador told Minister of Interior Rafik Belhaj Kacem that, as the two letters indicated, the USG continued to consider GOT intelligence cooperation unsatisfactory. Belhaj Kacem was plainly displeased by the characterization (though he had heard it before from the Ambassador and others) and told the Ambassador the GOT believed its cooperation to be exemplary. (NB. This was one of a series of conversations the Ambassador had on this subject with senior GOT officials, including Minister of State Ben Dhia and Foreign Minister Abdallah.)

[1](#)4. (S/NF) Although Belhaj Kacem did not expressly offer to

improve cooperation, in the weeks since the November meeting, there has been a noticeable upswing in information flow from the Ministry of Interior. Specifically, and as reported through other channels, the MOI has shared the following information with GRPO:

-- Facts about the December 2006/January 2007 terrorist plot (Ref B) that allegedly targeted US and UK interests in Tunisia, including information about weapons and explosives found in the group's possession;

-- Information about the MOI's counterterrorism efforts along Tunisia's borders;

-- MOI characterizations of the threat of domestic extremism; and

-- Background on Tunisian foreign fighters and facilitators.

¶5. (S/NF) Comment. While it is too early to judge if the recent upswing in MOI information sharing represents a shift in the GOT mindset, this cooperation is noteworthy in the Tunisian context. Foreign governments and security services often remark on the GOT's notoriously poor intelligence sharing and French President Sarkozy is expected to strongly demarche President Ben Ali during an early 2008 visit to Tunisia (Ref A). While we should not count this as a victory yet, we are cautiously optimistic that we have achieved a measure of success in our long-running effort with the GOT. Continued USG and foreign pressure on the GOT will be important as we seek to sustain this improvement over time and to further deepen the cooperation. End Comment.

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